



**Eulogy of Sister Theresa (Grace Michele) McNerney, BVM**  
Caritas Studio, Dec. 3, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Theresa McNerney.

Theresa Marie McNerney was born on Nov. 4, 1932, in Seattle to Michael and Grace (Banke) McNerney. She was the sixth of seven children and joined siblings Walt, Robert, Thomas, John, and Mary. Her younger sister, Grace, completed the family. Her Irish father worked as a fire marshal while her German mother cared for the family at home. When Theresa was only 5 years old, her mother died.

Theresa attended Blessed Sacrament and St. John grade schools and Holy Names Academy in Seattle. She decided to forego her last semester of high school to enter the congregation with her good friend Rose Ann Weber. Theresa arrived at Mount Carmel on Feb. 9, 1950, and received the name Grace Michele at her reception on Aug. 15, 1950. She professed first vows on Aug. 15, 1952, and lived 70 years as a BVM.

For the first 28 years of teaching, Theresa was missioned at St. Francis Xavier in Phoenix, Our Lady of Angels in Chicago, and Christ the King in Seattle. However, the majority of her ministry was in California at Our Lady of Lourdes in Tujunga, St. Patrick in Carlsbad, and Holy Redeemer in Montrose, and Assumption in Los Angeles, where she also served as principal.

It was during her 10 years at Assumption in Los Angeles that Theresa became assertive and implemented numerous changes that focused on the student and adapted the program to meet the child's needs. Theresa offered summer school and engaged BVMs to come to California and teach. She obtained grants to support teacher aides for enrichment and remedial programs. She provided a job training program for teenagers. Working with the teacher preparation program at Cal State University in Los Angeles, Theresa engaged teacher candidates to complete their student teaching at Assumption. She directed the Christian Family Education Program, the first bilingual sex education program in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. She organized and provided a school breakfast and lunch program from a renovated garage that provided free breakfast and lunch for 98 percent of the students.

In 1980, Theresa began her next 21 years of teaching when she took a position with the Los Angeles Unified School District. She accepted the position of primary bilingual teacher initially, but later served as a reading specialist in the District's Title I program, instructing at-risk children in reading skills, frequently serving at archdiocesan schools. In the summer of 1982, Theresa received a Third World Grant to travel to Guayaquil, Ecuador. There, she assisted a new first grade teacher at Nuevo Mundo in the beginning of the school year.

Theresa retired from the Los Angeles School District in 2001, but worked several years as a supervising teacher with CalStateTEACH, an innovative program to assist elementary school teachers who had a degree but needed to earn a teaching credential. During her remaining time in California, she volunteered as an ombudsperson for the Orange County Council on Aging. In this capacity, she visited residents in long-term care facilities, investigated their complaints, and ensured their needs were being met.

Theresa moved to Brookfield, Ill., in 2006, where she served the congregation as healthcare coordinator for the Great Lakes Region. She also ministered as a long-term care ombudsperson for the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago and volunteered for School on Wheels, an English as a Second Language program for adults run by the Congregation of St. Joseph in LaGrange Park.

Theresa was a bright, articulate, professional educator who possessed the ability to have open and intelligent discussions with people in a variety of professions. Being serious and intensely motivated, she set a high standard of achievement for herself. As an analytical thinker, she weighed the factual evidence before deciding on a course of action that often was quite creative.

With her social science background, Theresa had an extensive knowledge and keen awareness of the social and economic problems of our nation and the world. She also had an inner strength that kept her persistent in the face of injustice. She boldly took necessary risks and spoke up for those on the margins. For several years, she participated in demonstrations at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Ga. She also participated in demonstrations in support of the United Farm Workers and in a caravan in support of the sanctuary movement. She was even arrested at the Nevada Test Site for demonstrating against nuclear weapons.

Theresa had a vivacious and enthusiastic personality. She loved being with people—visiting with them, inviting them for a home-cooked meal, and playing board games. She also enjoyed camping, biking, music, and outdoor concerts at the Hollywood Bowl.

She was direct with her speech; no one ever wondered what she was thinking. She was devoted to feminine spirituality and to the use of inclusive language, especially in the naming of God.

Her empathy and compassion helped Theresa recognize, understand, and address the needs of others. She truly cared about people—all people. This was evident in her visits to those in hospitals and rehab centers and in her frequent phone calls to sister friends at Marian Hall. It was all part of her never-ending desire to be of greater service.

Theresa had a tremendous amount of pain during the last few years of her life, but she always made an effort to be positive and cheerful. Years ago while contemplating her last wishes, she gave us her final directive: “Rejoice that I was born and that I am going home.”

And so with gratitude and joy, we bid farewell to this “valiant, joyful, strong, patient, loving, [and] sharing woman.” (Based on Proverbs 31.) May she have a grand reunion with our loving God.